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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

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18 January 1954

SUBJECT: DRAFT SPECIAL BOARD ESTIMATE: PROBABLE EUROPEAN
REACTIONS TO US PROPOSALS REGARDING BERLIN

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the reactions of the UK, France, and West Germany to a US proposal for the prompt use of forceful measures in the event of a Soviet blockade or action tantamount to a blockade of Berlin.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. That Soviet or East German measures have reached a point threatening the access to Berlin of the Western Allies, West Germany, or both.

2. That the Western Allies have held the Soviets responsible for these measures, and have affirmed their right and intent to maintain their positions in Berlin and unrestricted access thereto, and their objection to the Soviet or East German measures, which have nonetheless been continued or increased.

3. That the US and the Western Allies have not instituted an airlift to supply Berlin, (other than for purposes such as personnel transfer, special needs, etc.).

4. That, by virtue of its stockpile, Berlin is not in physical distress or in prospect of being so within a period of 3 to 6 months.

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5. That the US proposal calls for the use of "limited military force, initially to the extent necessary to determine Soviet intentions (e.g., by armed convoy under orders not to shoot except in self-defense)," thereafter to attempt to reopen access to Berlin (e.g., by armed convoy under orders to shoot if prevented from going through). In either case the US would make clear to its allies its belief that Berlin is not militarily defensible and that if determined Soviet armed opposition should develop when US units attempt to force their way into or out of Berlin, no additional forces would be committed, but resort would have to be made to general war.

6. That the US would propose, or would already have initiated, measures to step up US readiness for war.

DISCUSSION

7. The UK, France, and West Germany recognize the immense symbolic value of the Western position in Berlin and the prestige that rests on maintaining that position. The UK and France, as well as the US, are publicly and unequivocally committed to defending their Berlin position against armed attack by Soviet and/or East German forces. Accordingly, the Western Powers would almost certainly regard such a Soviet attack as a deliberate initiation of general war.

8. We know of no similar warning with respect to a new blockade of Berlin. The European powers, therefore, would almost certainly not regard this move by the USSR as a deliberate initiation of war. Rather,

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they would probably conclude that Soviet intentions were limited to the bloodless ejection of the Western Powers from Berlin, and that the Kremlin did not expect war to eventuate. The European powers would probably insist, therefore, that Western attempts to remain in Berlin be limited to non-warlike measures.

9. In event of blockade, the UK, France, and West Germany would almost certainly concur in all manner of diplomatic representations, in resort to the UN, in any UN-sponsored sanctions, and in any feasible diplomatic and economic countermeasures that would press on the Soviet position in Berlin. Britain and France would almost certainly deny that blockade amounted to armed aggression within the meaning of the NATO treaty, although they, as well as other NATO members, would probably wish to discuss the situation in the NATO Council.

10. The UK, France, and West Germany would probably go no further than to acquiesce in the use of "limited military force to the extent necessary to determine Soviet intentions." In acquiescing to the use of an armed convoy for this purpose, however, they would probably insist that such a convoy be directed not to "shoot" even in self defense, but that it be under ^{orders} to turn back if fired on. The European

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powers would probably reject any US proposal that opened up even a moderate risk of general war, and would almost certainly reject categorically any proposal that involved possible initiation by the West of general war as a result of a Berlin blockade.

11. Thus, a US proposal unilaterally to ram through an armed convoy with instructions to shoot if necessary would probably be vigorously opposed by the European powers. Moreover, these powers would almost certainly reject any US proposal to initiate general war in the event of determined Soviet armed opposition to such a convoy.

12. Such governmental reactions would be supported overwhelmingly by public opinion. The governments and people of Western Europe believe that a general war would mean devastation and unmitigated disaster, regardless of the victor. Sensitive to any Western actions which might provoke the USSR to launch war, they themselves would tolerate strong provocation in order to avoid it. Only if convinced that the USSR intended general war or unmistakably threatened their independence would they be prepared for armed struggle. A blockade of Berlin would not for them reflect that intention or threat.

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13. If the US should ignore allied opposition to its proposals and general war should result from US action, European opinion regarding responsibility for the conflict would be muddled. Many European officials and large sections of the people would believe that the war could have been avoided and would blame US impulsiveness rather than Soviet aggressiveness for its initiation. Neutralist sentiment would spread broadly, and it would not be confined to the European left. However, we believe that the British, French, and West German governments would consider it impossible to remain neutral in the conflict. Therefore, however reluctantly, they would probably feel compelled to adhere to the Western coalition under US leadership. Their ability to prosecute the war, however, would be seriously impaired by an apathetic if not hostile public opinion. There would be grave danger, particularly in the event of serious allied military reverses, that neutralist or pacifist public pressure might result in the overthrow of even the British government.

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